DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 198 713 FL 012 120

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TITLE The Present Progressive in Spanish.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 14p.: Paper presented at the Symposium on Spanish and Portuguese Bilingualism (4th, Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, November 14-15, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Bilingualism: *Interference (Language): Language Patterns: Language Research: *Mexican Americans: *Spanish: Spanish Speaking: *Standard Spoken Usage: Textbook Content
IDENTIFIERS *Tense (Verbs)

ABSTRACT

This study tests the hypothesis that, among bilingual Mexican Americans, the present progressive tense in Spanish is used in the same situations as the progressive would be used in English, even if such usage would not be prescribed by standard Spanish grammar rules. A review is made of Spanish language instructional textbooks concerning the usage of the present progressive tense in Spanish. The results of the study are based on data from two groups of speakers. The first group is made up of English-dominant bilinguals. Their median length of residence in the United States was 22 years and their median age was 21 years. The other group was of Spanish monolinguals whose median age was also 21 years, and whose median length of residence in the U.S. was 17 months. Personal data and language attitude questionnaires were given as well as a structured choice and a free style test on the use of the present progressive in Spanish. The results of the study in both sections of the test do not support the hypothesis. It is concluded that the choice of the present progressive or simple present tense in Spanish is apparently not dictated by knowledge of English, but is a choice determined by other linguistic factors inherent in the two tenses in Spanish. (AMH)

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THE PRESENT PROGRESSIVE IN SPANISH

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By its very size and rate of growth, the Chicano, or Mexican-American, population in the United States draws attention to itself from many fields, including linguistics. But, unfortunately, in relation to research on other identifiable linguistic groups, very little research in the area of language use among Chicanos has been done. A cry is further raised by Chicano scholars themselves that it is unfortunate that most of the research about Chicanos in sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and education has benefited the non-Hispanic scholars who use the results of the research in their publications. Hopefully, the results of this study will benefit the Chicano, giving him linguistic security, and hopefully the instructors of the Chicano will benefit from increased linguistic awareness.

Research on the use of the present progressive tense in Spanish is by no means voluminous, and the amount of specific research on the possible influence (interference) of the usage of the present progressive tense in English on that of Spanish is even less. Nevertheless, innumerable Mexican-Americans, both inside and outside the classroom, have indicated uncertainty among themselves as to the "proper usage" of simple present tense and the present progressive tense in Spanish, and, in addition, they express desire not to sound "too English" when speaking Spanish. The present progressive tense in Spanish is formed by using a conjugated form of the verb ESTAR, which indicates number and person, plus a present participle (gerund), which always remains unchanged as to person and number. The following Spanish language instructional textbooks, chosen for their diversity in approach as well as their diversity of publication dates, have this to say concerning the usage

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of the present progressive tense in Spanish:

The New First Spanish Book by Lawrence A. Wilkins, 1925, says that " the gerund is used with the verb ESTAR to form a periphrastic (roundabout, indirect) conjugation in all moods and tenses, which we shall call conjugation of the progressive tenses". The text, in all 400 some pages, does not instruct at all on the usage of the present progressive tense except to merely indicate how it is formed primarily for usage of the gerund alone in other types of grammatical constructions. The simple present tense is dealt with extensively in Beginning Spanish Course by Donald Barton and Richard W. Tyler, 1954. The authors say that "the progressive tenses are used instead of simple tenses to emphasize that an action is (was, will be, etc.) actually in progress." In parenthesis the text continues, "technically, the simple tenses may also indicate that an action is going on, but they [the simple tenses] are less emphatic than the progressive tenses." Review Text in Spanish Three Years by Robert Nassi, Bernard Bernstein, and Theodore R. Nuzzi, 1965, states that "the gerund is used...to stress the fact that an event is (or was, will be) in progress or is continuing at the moment." The present tense is translated in all examples as equal to a simple present or present progressive translation. Foundation Course in Spanish by Laurel H. Turk and Aurelio M. Espinoza, Jr., 1974, states that "the progressive forms of tenses in Spanish are less frequent and more emphatic than in English". In other words, the texts instruct that (1) the simple present can be used to express the progressive (2) that the progressive is only used to emphasize that an action is in progress, and (3) that generally the progressive tenses should be used less often than the simple tenses.

As regards the use of the present progressive tense by bilingual speakers

of Mexican-American descent, the following was found:

Joseph W. Zdenek in his article "Another Look at the Progressive" states that "in general and in actuality, Spanish prefers the present to the progressive and [English-speaking] students should, as a result, be discouraged from projecting a too frequent use of the progressive into Spanish." In her article, "Nuestra Circunstancia Lingüística" Rosaura Sánchez goes further and states that the Mexican-American adheres to the standard-prescribed usage for tenses in Spanish but that concerning the present tense there is a tendency to add time duration, that is, to use the progressive in the same situations as the progressive would be used in English. And, in her article "The Salient Differences Between Chicano Spanish and Standard Spanish: Some Pedagogical Considerations", Veronica González-Mena de Lococo states that "the usages of the English present progressive tenses have been extended to the corresponding Spanish tenses."

For the present study, then, the following hypothesis was tested:

> In the speech of bilingual Chicanos, the usage of the present progressive tense in English has been extended to the usage of the corresponding present progressive tense in Spanish, that is, that the progressive in Spanish is used in the same situations as the progressive would be used in English even if such usage would not be prescribed by standard Spanish grammar rules.

THE INFORMANTS

The results of this study are based on data from two groups of speakers. The first group is English-dominant bilinguals whose parents were generally

born in Mexico and whose parents had only an elementary education. Their median length of residence in the United States was 22 years; the median age was 21 years; the median years of formal education for the parents of the informants were 9 years each; 84% of the informants had studied Spanish formally; the language most used at home was: Spanish 49% - English 51%. The language that the informants felt they spoke most comfortably was: Spanish for 16% and English for 84%. The second groups is Spanish monolinguals, the majority of whose parents were also born in Mexico and whose parents also had only an elementary education. The monolingual informants' median age was also 21 years; their mean length of residence in the United States was 17 months; as to the formal education of the parents of the monolingual informants, only 11% had finished the equivalent of our elementary school.

THE FORMAT

Each bilingual and each monolingual informant received a Personal Data Questionnaire and a Language Attitude Orientation Questionnaire, both adapted from the questionnaire given in the article "Assessing Language Maintenance in Spanish Speaking Communities in the Southwest" by Andrew D. Cohen, from which bilinguality was determined. The second part of the overall study consisted of two parts: a Structured Choice section and a Free Style section. Both sections used the same series of three pictures of everyday scenes (the park, a party, the home). The pictures were simply drawn and as culturally bias-free as possible with extensive use of lines and marks similar to those used in comic strips to indicate movement and action in progress. In the Structured Choice section the informants were asked to look at each picture and then to choose the sentence from each pair of given sentences that, in their judgment, best described the situation

or action in that picture. This section was then collected and the Free Style section was then given. Looking at the same three pictures on the top half of each page, the informants were then instructed via written directions to write, free style, their own description of the picture.

RESULTS OF THE STRUCTURED CHOICE SECTION

All "a" sentences in this section were in the simple present tense and all "b" sentences in this section employed the present progressive tense; i.e. (a) El sol brilla (b) El sol está brillando. For those sentences not employing the verbs IR and LLEVAR, a significant majority of the bilingual informants chose "b", that is, the sentences with the present progressive.

STRUCTURED CHOICE SECTION
BILINGUAL INFORMANTS
Percentages

Item No.	Simple Present (a)	Present Progressive (b)
59	18	82
60	32	68
63	22	78
64	15	85
65	20	80
67	28	72
69	31	69
70	46	54
71	41	59

Concerning the responses for the monolinguals, a significant majority of them also chose "b" responses.

STRUCTURED CHOICE SECTION
MONOLINGUAL INFORMANTS
Percentages

Item No.	Simple Present (a)	Present Progressive (b)
59	11	89
60	22	78
63	22	78
64	33	67
65	33	67
67	22	78
69	22	78
70	56	44
71	44	56

The above results for both monolingual and bilingual informants do not support the study's hypothesis; monolingual informants also preferred the present progressive tense indicating that English influence (interference) is not a factor in tense usage preference.

Items 70 and 71, as can be seen above, had a nearly identical percentage split on response choice for both monolinguals and bilinguals. Item 70 is: (a) El sol brilla (b) El sol está brillando (The sun shines/ The sun is shining). Apparently among the bilingual informants only slightly more than half felt there was enough "action" to warrant the use of the present progressive. A possible explanation can be found in Joseph W. Zdenek's article "Another Look at the Progressive" wherein he states that "a statement of natural law...requires the present even when the action is in progress." It cannot be argued here that the bilingual informants' choice of the present progressive was dictated by their knowledge of English since an English speaker could only choose the present progressive. Half of the bilingual informants as well as almost half of the monolingual informants chose present progressive. Something else is at work here.

Item 71 made use of an idiomatic expression: tratar + de + infinitive (to try to...). The sentence was: (a) El perro trata de coger la pelota (b) El perro está tratando de coger la pelota. 59% of the bilingual informants and 56% of the monolingual informants chose "b" signifying that English interference (influence) is not the dictating factor as to tense choice. These results do not support the hypothesis.

THE VERB IR

Items 61, 68, and 73 employed the verb IR (to go). Spanish instructional textbooks generally instruct the non-use of the present progressive tense for the verb IR, that is, ESTAR plus the gerund of IR (yendo) is said to not, or rarely, occur. This verb was introduced into this study as a control measure, that is, the researcher felt that the choice of ESTAR plus the present progressive of IR (yendo) would indicate some degree of English present progressive tense usage interference into the present progressive of Spanish as per this study's hypothesis. The results were as follows:

STRUCTURED CHOICE SECTION: IR
BILINGUAL INFORMANTS
Percentage

	Simple Present	Present Progressive
Item 61	67	33
Item 68	56	44
Item 73	66	34

In other words, the verb IR was in simple present tense 2/3 of the time; 1/3 of the time IR was in the present progressive. This information would not surprise proponents of English interference into the use of the present progressive tense in Spanish because they could say that the 1/3 of the

responses with the verb IR in present progressive demonstrates that there is English interference. But, the responses of the monolinguals do not support that conclusion.

STRUCTURED CHOICE SECTION: IR
MONOLINGUAL INFORMANTS
Percentage

	Simple Present (a)	Present Progressive (b)
Item 61	56	44
Item 68	67	33
Item 73	63	33

Monolinguals and bilinguals had a relatively equal percent of "b" responses, that is, responses using the present progressive tense of IR. This data does not support the hypothesis.

THE VERB LLEVAR

Items 62, 66, and 72 employed the verb LLEVAR (to carry, to wear). The verb LLEVAR has a semantic restriction as regards tense usage: the simple present tense can refer to both "carry" and "wear" (as in clothes) whereas the present progressive conjugation of LLEVAR is generally used to indicate the action of "carrying" but not that of "wearing" since "wearing" is not an action per se. This verb was also introduced into the study as a control measure, that is, the inappropriate choice of LLEVAR (appropriateness determined by the picture) would indicate some degree of English present progressive tense usage interference into the present progressive of Spnaish as per this study's hypothesis. The results were:

STRUCTURED CHOICE SECTION: LLEVAR
BILINGUAL INFORMANTS
Percentage

	Simple Present (a)	Present Progressive (b)
Item 62	76	24
Item 66	85	15
Item 72	91	9

The verb LLEVAR was highly preferred in simple present tense for both semantic readings "carry" and "wear". Again proponents of English present progressive tense usage interference would say that this data supports the hypothesis. But, the responses of the monolinguals do NOT support that conclusion.

STRUCTURED CHOICE SECTION
MONOLINGUAL INFORMANTS
Percentage

	Simple Present (a)	Present Progressive (b)
Item 62	56	44
Item 66	67	33
Item 72	67	33

The monolingual speakers chose the present progressive use of LLEVAR more than did the bilingual informants, that is, monolinguals had a higher percentage of "b" responses than did bilinguals! This data does not support the hypothesis.

RESULTS OF THE FREE STYLE SECTION

The results of the Free Style section are more difficult to analyze. With no structured choice, analysis, correlations, and statistics become a near impossibility, and any that are formulated are open to question. Because of this variability, only general statements about the informants'

choices can be made when these choices are compared with those made on the Structured Choice section. There seem to be three different ways in which the informants could choose the tenses:

(1) The informant would prefer the present progressive responses in the Structured Response section and also use more of the present progressive in the Free Style section.

(2) The informant would prefer the simple present tense answers in Structured Response section and also use more of the simple present tense in the Free Style section.

(3) The informant would mix responses with no apparent pattern or with an alternating pattern, that is, choose "b" answers in the Structured Response section and avoid the present progressive in the Free Style section, or vice versa.

Upon analyzing the individual monolingual and bilingual informants' choices in the Structured Choice section and the same individual monolingual and bilingual informants' responses in the Free Style section, no pattern was distinguished. Of course, not in all instances was the identical verb employed in the Structured Choice section used in the Free Style section. Only when the same verb was used was a comparison made. For example, bilingual informant 1-B chose the present progressive response "b" (está gritando) in the Structured Choice section but wrote the simple present tense (grita) in the Free Style section. Bilingual informant 8-B chose an "a" response (grita) in the Structured Choice section but wrote "está gritando" in the Free Style section. And then there were bilingual informants who chose and wrote both present progressive or both simple present. Even when using the verb IR, which is supposedly restricted in the present progressive, some informants adhered to the supposed restrictions in their responses in

both the Structured Choice section and the Free Style section whereas some informants alternated their responses in either direction. The monolingual informants' responses in the Free Style section were as varied! In general, the monolinguals used the present progressive more freely than did the bilinguals, but still the various combinations of responses occurred, even with the verb IR.

Among the bilingual informants were several instructors of Spanish for the Mexican-American. It is interesting to note that these individuals' responses had the same variation in choice as to present progressive versus simple present in the Structured Choice section and the Free Style section as did any other bilingual or monolingual informant. These informants would either choose "a" (simple present) in the Structured Choice section and write present progressive in the Free Style section, or vice versa. There was no less of a tendency to alternate. Furthermore, upon completion of the survey, two of the instructor-informants were asked why they had varied, that is, why, for instance, they had chosen "está gritando" or "está brillando" in the Structured Choice section but had written "grita" or "brilla" (simple present) in the Free Style section, or vice versa. One instructor-informant answered that he felt that the structured choice in the Structured Choice section was a more "formal" choice prompting him to choose answers that would be prescribed by a Spanish textbook whereas in the Free Style section he felt that he could write as he would speak. The other instructor-informant, in a totally separate instance, reported just the opposite: he felt that the Free Style section had made him much more conscious of his grammar and syntax whereas in the Structured Choice section he felt that he could choose answers according to how he would speak.

In both instances, what is interesting to note is that both instructor-informants were aware of the discrepancy in their choices and didn't seem the least bit surprised. They were more concerned with justifying the discrepancy than with the fact that there was one.

The results of this study do not indicate that the use of the present progressive tense in English is being extended to the present progressive use in Spanish; the results of this study do indicate that the present progressive tense in Spanish is not being used in all the same situations where the progressive would be used in English all of the time. The correct response in English to describe the same action/situation in the same picture is not an interchangeable one between the simple present and the present progressive. The extent of the freedom of alternation between the present progressive and simple present in Spanish far exceeds that possible in English. Therefore, the choice of the present progressive or simple present tense in Spanish is apparently not dictated by knowledge of English, but is, instead, a choice determined by other linguistic factors inherent in the two tenses in Spanish. Various speculative explanations do come to mind. Could it be that, similar to the double negative restriction imposed on English in the 17th century, a restriction on the use of the present progressive has been imposed on Spanish? In other words, could it be that there is a standard being imposed that is not valid for the natural language? With so little research done on the present progressive in Spanish, could it be that certain verbs semantically favor one tense over the other? Or perhaps upon tracing the history of the present progressive scholars could find a change in the increase in use of the present progressive to be a late development? Could the present

progressive/simple present be gradually differentiating, as in English, but not necessarily from English? The present progressive tense is a periphrastic formation rather than an inflected tense. Assuming that it is a late development, is it natural for a language to have a new tense with no contrastive value, no natural contrastive use?

Exciting research awaits all of us, Hispanic and non-Hispanic scholar alike, for the benefit of linguistic research, for the benefit of the speaker, the learner, and the teacher.